

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00

SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SAB-01 SAM-01 OMB-01 AID-05

ACDA-05 SCCT-01 /087 W

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O P 260525Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6386

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 11967

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE: LEBANON BITES THE BULLET
WILL IT EASE THE PAIN?

REF: BEIRUT 11955

SUMMARY: THE NEWLY FORMED " COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE"
(COMPOSED OF 10 CHRISTIANS AND 10 MOSLEMS) WAS DEVISED AS THE
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ONLY DISCERNIBLE WAY OUT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS. CONCEIVABLY IT

WILL DAMPEN THE FIGHTING, BUT ITS LARGER AIM OF TACKLING BASIC SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES MAY PROVE TOO FORMIDABLE A TASK. EVEN THE IMMEDIATE GOAL OF STOPPING ROUND 4 COULD BE BEYOND ITS CAPABILITIES, SINCE ITS FIRST SESSION SEPT 25 POSTPONED DELIBERATIONS UNTIL MONDAY, SEP 29 AND THE FRAGILE CEASEFIRE MUST HOLD UNTIL THEN TO PRESERVE THE COMMITTEE'S CREDIBILITY. LEFTISTS ARE STRONGLY REPRESENTED IN THE "DIALOGUE", BUT THEIR VOICE IS DIVIDED. THE ECLIPSE OF PRES FRANGIE IS INSTITUTIONALIZED, SINCE NONE OF THE MEMBERS IS CLEARLY A FRANGIE MAN. IN GENERAL: SO FAR SO GOOD, BUT THE HARD ROAD LIES AHEAD. END SUMMARY.

1. LEBANON HAS WAGERED MUCH ON A SINGLE CAST OF THE DICE WITH THE FORMATION OF THE 20 MAN "COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE" (REFTEL). AN EXAMINATION OF PREVIOUS ROUNDS THIS YEAR WILL SHOW THAT TEMPORARY OF A SIDE ISSUE WHICH HAD ASSUMED CENTRAL IMPORTANCE IN THE COURSE OF THE FIGHTING. ROUND ONE WAS BROUGHT TO VMA CLOSE BY GEMAYEL'S AGREEMENT TO TURN OVER FOR QUESTIONING SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS ACCUSED OF COMPLICITY IN SO-CALLED AIN RUMMANEH "MASSACRE" OF APRIL 14. ROUND TWO TAPERES OFF FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION OF THE MILITARY CABINET WHICH ASSUMED POWER ONLY AFTER RPT AFTER THAT ROUND BEGAN; AND ROUND THREE ENDED WITH NAMING OF KARAME CABINET. FOLLOWING SUCCESSION OF ABORTIVE CEASEFIRE, LEBANESE, WITH ASSISTANCE OF SYRIANS, HAVE SETTLED UPON DIALOGUE COMMITTEE AS DEVICE FOR HOPEFULLY BRINGING RELIEF FROM STRIFE WHICH HAS BROUGHT THIS COUNTRY AS NEAR TO NATIONAL COLLAPSE AS ANY DEVELOPMENT IN ITS TROUBLED HISTORY.

2. THE DIFFERENCE, THIS TIME, IS THAT THE SIDE ISSUE EMPLOYED (FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE) IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO SENSITIVE ISSUES WHICH UNDERLIE THE BASIC CONFLICTS IN THIS SOCIETY. IF THE ENVISIONED DIALOGUE DOES NOT BEAR SUBSTANTIVE FRUIT, THE COSMETIC EFFECT OF ITS INSTITUTIONALIZATION WILL NOT PRESERVE FOR LONG THE FRAGILE LULL IN THE CLASHES THAT HAVE BEEN TEARING AT LEBANON VITALS. SHOULD THE OPTION OF TALKING TO HEAL THE DEEP AND DIVISIVE FISSURES IN THE LEBANESE BODY POLITICAL FAIL, LEBANON MAY FIND ITSELF WITHOUT EVEN THE HOPE OF "NATIONAL RECONCILIATION" TO PREVENT ITS BEING SWEEPED OVER THE EDGE INTO THE ABYSS OF CIVIL WAR.

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3. NATURE OF THE COMMITTEE: THE "DIALOGUE COMMITTEE" WHICH ASSEMBLED AT 1100 HOURS (LOCAL) THIS MORNING FOR ITS INAUGURAL SESSION IS, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE AT LEAST, THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE GROUPING BROUGHT TOGETHER IN LEBANON SINCE INDEPENDENCE. WE FIND IT NOT WORTHY AS A STRAW IN THE WIND THAT COMMITTEE INCLUDES TEN CHRISTIANS AND TEN MUSLIMS (DIVIDED AMONG SUNNI, SHIITE AND DRUZE). A USEFUL PRECEDENT HAS THEREFORE BEEN SET AT THE OUTSET FOR A POSSIBLE 50-50 DIVISION BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND

CHRISTIANS AS A STEP TOWARD MEETING MOSLEMS DEMANDS FOR
GREATER POLITICAL POWER. CONFESSIONAL AFFILIATION, OF COURSE,
DOES NOT TELL THE ENTIRE STORY. TO GIVE BUT TWO EXAMPLES,
ONE OF THE TWO DRUZE, ARSLAN (JUMBLATT IS THE OTHER), CAN
BE EXPECTED TO ACT IN CLOSE CONCERT WITH PRESENT INTMIN CHAMOUN.
ABBAS KHALAF, ALTHOUGH A CHRISTIAN, WILL BE HAVE IN HIS CAPACITY
AS A LEFTIST. CONAEQUENTLYUN IT IS NECESSARY TO LOOK ALSO TO
THE POLITICAL COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP.
GODLEY

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4. THE LEFT: ONE IMMEDIATELY STRIKING FACT IS THAT THE LEBANESE LEFT ACHIEVED CONSIDERABLE (PROBABLY DISPROPORTIONATE) REPRESENTATION (JUMBLATT, KHALAF, AWADAH, KANSU, AND POSSIBLE QARANOUH). THIS ADDED WEIGHT WAS QUITE LIKELY THE PRICE JUMBLATT EXTRACTED FOR HIS AGREEMENT TO SIT DOWN WITH GEMAYEL AND TO SOFTEN HIS DEMAND THAT THE LEFTIST REFORM PROPOSALS BE ACCEPTED AS THE BASIS OF DISCUSSION. ON THE OTHER HAND, KANSU (SHIITE) REPRESENTS THE PRO-SYRIAN BAATH PARTY OF LEBANON AND CAN BE BROKEN STEP IN PAST WITH

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JUMBLATT AND OTHER LEFTISTS. QARANOUH IS ALSO REPORTEDLY CLOSE TO SUNNI GRAND MUFTI KHALED HASSAN AND MAY TEND TO ORIENT HIMSELF TOWARD OTHER MORE MIDDLE-OF-THE ROAD SUNNIS (KARAME, SALAAM, AND YAFI). NEVERTHELESS, LEFTIST ROLE IN COUNTRY'S POLITICAL XUTURE FINDS SUBSTANTIAL RECOGNITION IN COMMITTEE.

5. SUNNI/SHITTE EQUALITY: TO THE EXTENT THAT COMMITTEE MAKE-UP MAY PROVIDE A BELLWEATHER FOR THE FUTURE, WE ALSO FIND PARITY BETWEEN SUNNI AND SHIITE PARTICIPANTS SIGNIFICANT. LIKE SUNNIS, SHIITES HAVE FOUR REPRESENTATIVES (ASAAD, WAHID, AWADAH, AND KANSU). SHIITE CHOSEN, HOWEVER, REFLECT SERIOUS DIFFERENCES WITHIN LEBANON'S LARGEST AND POOREST MINORITY. WAHID IS THE SOLE SPOKESMAN FOR THE IMAM MUSA SADR AND THERE ARE ALREADY RUMBLINGS OF THE IMAM'S DISSATISFACTION WITH THE SLIM RECOGNITION ACCORDED HIS ROLE IN LEBANON. ASAAD IS, OF COURSE, A BITTER POLITICAL RIVAL OF THE IMAM AND DID NOT ATTEND THE FIRST SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE, PLEADING THE PRESS OF PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS. HE HAD EARLIER CALLED A SPECIAL SESSION OF PARLIAMENT TO CONSIDER THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS. AWADAH AND KANSU, AS NOTED ABOVE, ARE TO THE LEFT OF THE IMAM IDEOLOGICALLY, BUT, OF THE TWO, WE BELIEVE WAHID WOULD FIND KANSU MORE COOPERATIVE. SABRI HAMADE, FORMER SPEAKEC AND A SHIITE POWER IN THE BAALBEK REGION, IS RELIABLY REPORTED TO BE LIVID AT HIS EXLUSCION FROM PROCEEDINGS AND ADEL OSSEIRAN (CURRENTLY MINISTER) IS THE ONLY MEMBER OF CABINET NOT INCLUDED IN GROUP OF TWENTY. WE SUSPECT BECAUSE OF ILL HEALTH.

6. ECLIPSE OF FRANGIE: COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE REPRESENTS, IN OUR VIEW, FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE DECLINING INFLUENCE AND INCREASING IRRELEVANCE OF THE PRESIDENT. CURRENT JOKE AROUND BEIRUT IS QUERY REGARDING HOW LONG FRANGIE HELD UP FORMATION OF COMMITTEE ARGUING FOR INCLUSION OF HIS SON, TONY--A CONSPICUOUS ABSENTEE. WE CAN FIND NO RPT NO MEMBER OF COMMITTEE WHO MIGHT BE LABELLED A "FRANGIE MAN." DEPUTY RENE MOUAWAD PROBABLY WOULD BE SYMPATHETIC TO FRANGIE'S VIEWS SINCE HE IS ALSO A MARONITE FROM ZGHORTA/EHDEN, BUT IT IS PROBABLY TOO

STRONG TO SUGGEST THAT HE IS THE PRES'S REPRESENTATIVE.
SABA, WHO HAS FREQUENTLY SERVED AS A GO-BETWEEN FOR
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FRANGIE TO JUMBLATT, IS DEFINITELY NOT ON THE FRANGIE TEAM.
ON THE OTHER HAND, THE FULL MEMBERSHIP OF THE TRIPARTITE
ALLIANCE (KARAME, SALAAM, AND EDDE), WHICH WAS FOUNDED
UPON THE BEDROCK OF OPPOSITION TO FRANGIE, MADE THE RE-
CONCILIATION TEAM.

7. COMMITTEE'S FIRST SESSION: COMMITTEE HAS JUST COM-
PLETED ITS FIRST FOUR-HOUR SESSION AND SET 1000 HOURS, MON,
SEPT 29 FOR THE NEXT MEETING. IN ADDITION TO ASAAD, BOTH
TAQLA AND RABBATH WERE ABSENT DUE TO LRAVEL ABORAD. KARAME
SERVED AS CHAIRMAN THIS GO-ROUND, BUT WE UNDERSTAND THAT
POSITION WILL ROTATE IN SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS. ACCORDING TO
PRELIMINARY REPORTS OF MEETING, EXCLUSION OF MENTION OF
PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN COUNTRY WAS ONLY PRECONDITION OF
SESSION. WE UNDERSTAND ALSO THAT ALL PARTICIPANTS SHOOK
HANDS AND THAT ATMOSPHERE OF SESSION WAS AS CONCILIATORY
AS COULD BE EXPECTED. STATEMENT ISSUED AT CLOSE OF TODAY'S
MEETING COVERED THREE POINTS: (A) RESPECT FOR CEASEFIRE;
(B) ADHERENCE TO LEBANESE FORMULA ON BASIS THAT LEBANON
IS FOR ALL CITIZENS AND NOT ANY ONE GROUP, AND (C) AGREEMENT
TO CONTINUE CONSULTATIONS TO REACH POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND
TZVTAL REFORM WITHIN DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK.

8. THUS FAR, DIALOGUE COMMITTEE HAS SUCCEEDED ONLY IN
APPLYING SOOTHING BALM TO NATIONAL WOUNDS REQUIRING RADI-
CAL SURGERY. FACT THAT IT DID NOT RPT NOT COLLAPSE ON ITS
FIRST OUTING SHOULD BE ACCOUNTED A PLUS, BUT PARTIES ARE
STILL VERY FAR FROM ATTACKING CONSTRUCTIVELY SUBSTANTIVE IS-
SUES WHICH DIVIDE THEM. EVEN MINIMAL PROGRESS ACHIEVED
BY THE VERY HOLDING OF TODAY'S SESSION MAY, IN COMBINATION
WITH LEBANESE WAR-WEARINESS AND AMMUNITION SHORTAGES, BUY
AT LEAST BRIEF RESPITE FROM CAPITAL'S AGONIES. CHRISTIANS OF
THE RIGHT AND LEFTISTS, WHO ARE RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN
BULLIED BY KHADDAM INTO ACCEPTING TALKS, BOTH HOLD INFLEXI-
BLE POLITICAL VISIONS OF THE APPROPRIATE SHAPE OF THIS COUNTRY.
IF CEASEFIRE BREAKS DOWN SUBSTANTIALLY PRIOR TO NEXT COMMITTEE
MEETING FOUR DAYS FROM NOW, ENTIRE RECONCILIATION STRUCTURE
SO LABORIOUSLY PUT TOGETHER WILL PROBABLY COME CRASHING
DOWN. BEIRUT IS RELATIVELY QUIET THIS AFTERNOON, BUT
ARMED MEN ARE NOT FAR FROM MILITARY POSITIONS THEY OCCUPIED
UNTIL THIS MORNING AND COULD QUICKLY BE BACK IN COMBAT. IF
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STANDDOWN HOLDS FOR THE TIME BEING (WE WOULD RATE CHANCES AT NO MORE THAN 50 PERCENT), SUBSEQUENT COMMITTEE SESSIONS WILL BE REplete WITH OPPORTUKITIES FOR A BREAKDOWN OF PROCESS AS CONCRETE ISSUES ARE TACKLED.

9. LEBANON IS RIPE FOR ON E OF ITS FABLED "MIRACLES," BUT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO PREDICT ONE IN THE MIDST OF THE HATREDS AND ANIMOSITIES WHICH HAVE BLOSSOMED INTO FULL FLOWER OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS. THE OUTLOOK REMAINS GRIM. IF THE LEBANESE HAVE TAKEN THE BULLET IN THEIR TEETH AT LAST, ONE MUST CONSTANTLY BE AWARE THAT THEY ALSO RETAIN A ROUND IN THE CHAMBER.
GODLEY

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